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Is Photography Dead?

Though technology continues to advance, it is often that human nature stays the same. In the case of photography, old age and new age - there are still the same needs for it. Photos then and now are only as meaningful, powerful, or artistic as the person behind the lens makes them, or the person viewing the print interprets them. Because of this, critiques that Susan Sontag makes in the chapter *In Plato's Cave* still stand today. Though every aspect may not apply indefinitely due to new digital technology, the purpose and critique still exist. Digital technology has simply amplified the uses or need for photography by making it as easy as a hand-held device, an at home print or an online medium on which to post.

Sontag argues in the chapter that photography is a means of which one person is deciding which aspects of the world are most important or should be noticed. Since its development in the 1840's, "photography has become one of the principle devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation" (Sontag)¹. This statement is as relevant today as it was in 1997. In that time, cameras and film were harder to come by; whereas today, mostly everyone carries a ready to go camera in their pocket, the cell phone. The biggest advancement in digital technology that makes this statement true is the creation of social media platforms on which photos are the whole basis. For example, Instagram and Snapchat are used to take photos and share with friends and family what you're doing in the moment or what you have done recently. If it wasn't posted to these sights, did it even happen or were you even there? As Sontag points

¹ Sontag, Susan. "In Plato's Cave." *On Photography*, 1977, pp. 3–24.

out that to participate in viewing photos is to participate in an event, these media platforms allow for this partaking. Because of photography and the developed sharing mechanisms, even those who couldn't physically participate in a given event are given a participatory experience through viewing the photos captured by a friend or family member. If it wasn't for photography and the author's behind the lenses, many would not know what other places, travel sights, or even foods would look like. Because of this, in 1977 and even now, we take in our experiences as the world being a "set of potential photographs" or souvenirs, rather than enjoying the scene for what it is in that moment (Sontag). Digital technology simply found its way to make anyone a photographer instead of only those who could afford the camera, film, or have means to develop the shots.

Photography isn't dead, it has just been simplified. Even Craig Mod argues in his article *Goodbye, Cameras* that editing on a cellphone is more natural. He says, "it's a return to the chemical-filled days of manually poking and massaging liquid and paper to form an image [seen in his] head" (Mod)². Digital photography amplified the medium by compressing "the core processes, [then] smartphones further squish the full spectrum of photographic storytelling: capture, edit, collate, share, and respond" all at the touch of a screen (Mod). This proves that photography has developed with the times and responded to digital technology in a way that still makes photographs as relevant and readily digestible as they were in the 1970's or 1980's.

² Mod, Craig. "Goodbye, Cameras." *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 18 June 2017